

PYQ Vault

560

Questions

50

Days

10

Years of PYQs

DAY 8

Political Ideologies · 11 questions

Every question carries a Flow Snapshot — and a handwritten model answer on the channel.

No PYQ will be unfamiliar.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2016 · 20 marks

"The Political ideology of Globalization is Neo-liberalism."
Comment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 Globalization not ideologically neutral → neoliberalism became its dominant logic since 1970s → statement substantially correct

R2 Define neoliberalism as revival of classical liberalism → free markets, minimal state, deregulation → sets up its alignment with globalization

Body flow

Intellectual foundations: **Hayek / Friedman / Nozick** → Washington Consensus → WTO, IMF, World Bank institutional architecture → market fundamentalism → costs: inequality, erosion of welfare, state autonomy reduced → 2008 crisis as moment of exposure

Counter-view

Polanyi: markets require state power, not natural → **Stiglitz / Rodrik / Woods**: globalization and neoliberalism are separable; other ideological frameworks possible → neoliberalism was a political choice, not structural necessity

Conclusion routes

R1 Statement describes historical reality of 1980–2008; not a permanent structural truth; neoliberal hegemony now contested

R2 Globalization is the economic channel; neoliberalism won it ideologically — but post-2008 backlash shows the alignment is breaking

Globalization - the accelerating integration of economies, societies and politics through trade, capital flows, technology and communication is not ideologically neutral. Since the 1970s, it has been driven, organized and justified by a specific set of ideas: neoliberalism. The statement captures this historical alignment with considerable accuracy, though it deserves qualification.

Neoliberalism is the contemporary revival of classical economic liberalism. It seeks the restoration of laissez-faire individualism, opposes welfare statism & state intervention & promotes deregulation, privatization, tax cuts, fiscal austerity & free trade. Its intellectual foundations rest on Friedrich August von Hayek who argued that planning is a road to serfdom, Milton Friedman who in capitalism and Freedom held that freedom is possible only through the market and Robert Nozick, who in Anarchy, state & Utopia defended the minimal state against redistributive justice.

This philosophy acquired institutional form through what became known as the Washington Consensus - centred on free trade, privatization & deregulation promoted via WTO, IMF, WB & OECD.

Transnational capital flows, MNCs & speculative finance expanded global market integration while simultaneously reducing the autonomy of nation states. This is why globalization came to be described as market fundamentalism.

Joseph Stiglitz called neoliberalism a "failed ideology". Thomas Piketty showed how wealth concentration undermines democracy. Naomi Klein linked neoliberalism to crisis politics - the deliberate use of shocks to push through market reforms. The 2008 Global Financial crisis was perhaps the most decisive moment: it exposed the fragility of a financial architecture built on deregulated capital & confirmed that unchecked markets carry systemic risks.

This brings us to the critical qualification. Karl Polanyi had already argued that free markets do not arise naturally - they require sustained state power to create and maintain. Dani Rodrik and Ngaire Woods showed that globalization as an economic process is separable from neoliberalism as its governing ideology; markets need regulation, transparency & institutional frameworks to function justly.

In this sense, the statement conflates a contingent historical outcome with a structural necessity. Globalization is the economic channel; neoliberalism is the ideology that captured it. Other ideological frameworks – developmental statism, social democracy, Keynesian welfare governance – are equally possible frameworks for managing global integration.

The statement is thus best read as an accurate description of how globalization actually unfolded between roughly 1980 & 2008, not as a claim that neoliberalism is globalization's only possible ideology. Globalization may be economically inevitable; its neoliberal form was a political choice.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2017 · 15 marks

Define Socialism. Discuss the salient features of Fabian Socialism.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1** Capitalism's private ownership of production → socialism as critique and alternative → equality of access as core demand
- R2** Socialism defined against capitalism → **Joad's** "hat" signals plurality of socialist methods → Fabianism as one distinct path

Body flow

Bottomore's definition → social control over production, equality of access (resources/knowledge/power) → varieties diverge on method → Fabianism named after **Fabius Cunctator** → constitutional/parliamentary road → state as instrument of reform → middle-class intellectual leadership → nationalization of key sectors, not total abolition → welfare reforms: municipal services, education, Labour Party link

Counter-view

Marxist critique: no class struggle, no labour theory of value, confined to intellectual circles, excessive gradualism

Conclusion routes

- R1** Fabianism as constitutional socialism — gradualist means, socialist ends — durable legacy in welfare state
- R2** Fabianism resolved socialist ends with liberal-democratic means; its influence in Labour politics proves viability

Socialism is a socio-economic doctrine that advocates collective or social control over the means of production, distribution and exchange. Tom Bottomore defined it as a social order ensuring feasible equality of access to economic resources, knowledge & political power, with the minimum possible domination of one group over another. Arising as a direct critique of industrial capitalism; which rested on private ownership, wage labour & accumulation – socialism holds that equality of outcome, not merely equality of opportunity is the legitimate goal of life.

Socialism however is not a monolithic movement. As C.E.M. Joad observed, it resembles "a hat which has lost its shape because everyone wears it." Fabian Socialism represents one distinctive strand: it accepts socialist ends but decisively rejects revolutionary means.

Named after Fabius Cunctator, the Roman general known for patient, strategic delay, Fabianism is the British gradualist form of socialism.

Its core features are: First, it holds that the transition from capitalism to socialism must be gradual & constitutional. Second, the state is treated as an instrument of reform rather than a class enemy to be overthrown. Third, Fabianism assigns a central role to middle-class intellectuals. Fourth, it supports selective nationalization of key industries & welfare reforms.

Sidney Webb, Beatrice Webb, George Bernard Shaw & Graham Wallas were its principal architects; their work shaped labour party politics and laid the intellectual foundation of the British welfare state.

Critics, especially from the Marxist tradition, charged that Fabianism lacked mass revolutionary energy, ignored class struggle and the labour theory of value and remained confined to intellectual circles.

Yet Fabianism's legacy - in welfare-state legislation, democratic socialism & post-colonial planning. It proved that socialist ends need not require revolutionary means.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2017 · 15 marks

Write a brief note on The End of History debate.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 Cold War ends → liberal democracy appears without rival → **Fukuyama's** triumphalist thesis emerges

R2 Ideological century closes → question: is liberal democracy the final destination or merely a dominant moment?

Body flow

Fukuyama's core claim (ideological endpoint, not cessation of events) → Hegelian basis: **Hegel** + **Kojève**, freedom and recognition → Cold War context validates thesis (Soviet collapse, Eastern Europe) → **Huntington** (civilizational conflict replaces ideological conflict) → **Žižek** (capitalism's contradictions unresolved) → **Kagan** (power and ambition endure) → Marxist/post-colonial (class inequality and Eurocentrism ignored) → empirical falsification: China, democratic recession, nationalism, identity politics

Counter-view

Fukuyama not claiming events cease — claiming ideological evolution ends; critics show even this narrower claim cannot hold

Conclusion routes

R1 Thesis remains historically significant as document of liberal triumphalism, not as settled truth

R2 History's grammar changed after 1991; it did not end

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 produced a striking claim liberal democracy had no serious ideological rival left. Francis Fukuyama made this argument most forcefully, drawing on G.W.F. Hegel and Alexandre Kojève to argue that history - understood as the struggle of competing ideological forms - had reached its final stage. Liberal democracy, grounded in freedom & the human need for recognition, had won.

Fukuyama was careful to distinguish his claim from a naive one. His argument was narrower: the ideological evolution of human societies had ended, because no serious alternative to liberal democracy remained capable of mobilising mass allegiance. The soviet collapse, the spread of democratic transitions across Eastern Europe and the Gulf war all seemed, in that moment, to confirm this reading.

Samuel P. Huntington offered the most direct challenge: post cold war conflict would be civilizational, not ideological, making history more turbulent, not less. Slavoj Žižek argued that capitalism's internal contradictions - inequality, exploitation, crisis were far from resolved.

Robert Kagan insisted that human ambition & power conflict are permanent features of political life that no liberal settlement could dissolve. Marxist & post-colonial critics added that the thesis was Eurocentric: it ignored persisting class inequality & the unfinished legacies of colonialism.

Contemporary evidence has weakened Fukuyama's thesis considerably. China's authoritarian rise, the global democratic recession, the return of nationalism and identity politics and the climate crisis all suggest that the ideological contest is very much alive.

The End of History debate matters not as a settled truth but as the clearest expression of post-Cold war liberal confidence, and of its limits.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2019 · 10 marks

Comment on the End of Ideology debate. [150 words]

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 Postwar prosperity + Cold War consensus → **Bell's** diagnosis of ideological exhaustion
- R2 Advanced societies converging toward pragmatic technocracy → ideology declared redundant

Body flow

Bell's core claim (technocracy replacing conflict) → **Lipset/Rostow** reinforce convergence → welfare-state affluence softens class lines → critics: **Marcuse** (masked domination) → **Mills** (elite ideology persists) → **Althusser** (ideology constitutive of social life) → history's verdict: feminism, environmentalism, post-colonialism disprove the thesis

Counter-view

Bell's diagnosis read as ideological itself — defending the status quo under the cover of neutrality

Conclusion routes

- R1 Thesis changed the terms of ideological struggle, did not end it
- R2 Ideology survives wherever power, inequality, and identity remain contested

The end of ideology debate emerged in the late 1950s, when post-war prosperity and cold war stability seemed to dissolve the sharp class antagonisms that had powered earlier ideological movements. Daniel Bell, writing in *The End of Ideology* (1960), argued that advanced industrial societies were moving away from grand doctrinal conflicts toward technocratic, pragmatic problem-solving.

Seymour Martin Lipset and Walt Whitman Rostow reinforced this convergence thesis, suggesting that rising affluence and welfare-state consensus had blurred the left-right divide and made mass ideological mobilisation obsolete.

The thesis attracted immediate & sustained criticism. Herbert Marcuse argued that Bell's account concealed domination beneath the surface of apparent consensus. C. Wright Mills held that ideology remained very much alive among governing elites, who exercised power through institutional rather than mass-movement channels.

Louis Althusser went further : ideology, he insisted, is not a passing phase but is constitutive of social life itself ; it cannot simply disappear.

History confirmed the critics. The rise of feminism, environmentalism and post-colonialism in the 1960s and beyond showed that new ideological formations were being born precisely at the moment Bell declared ideology dead. These movements contested power, identity and justice in ways no technocratic consensus could absorb.

Bell's thesis, therefore, did not end ideology. It changed the terrain of ideological struggle. The central disputes over equality, freedom and power were not resolved ; they were only reformulated.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2019 · 15 marks

What is the contemporary relevance of Marxism?

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 Post-1991 funeral declared premature → 2008 crisis revived **Marx** as diagnostic lens
- R2 Marxism outlasted Soviet collapse → capitalism's own contradictions returned the question

Body flow

Core categories: inequality + labour precarity (**Piketty, Streeck, Wolff**) → alienation reappears in gig economy (**Lukács**: reification) → cultural/ideological domination: **Gramsci**'s hegemony + **Marcuse**'s democratic unfreedom → global capitalism: world-systems and imperialism still Marxist terrain → Marxism itself forced capitalism toward welfare reform

Counter-view

Economic reductionism (**Weber**); authoritarian outcomes (**Popper, Arendt**) weaken revolutionary prescription while leaving analytical categories intact

Conclusion routes

- R1 Marxism survives not as blueprint but as indispensable critique of capital
- R2 Its categories grow sharper as inequality deepens — relevance is structural, not nostalgic

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 prompted many to declare Marxism obsolete. The 2008 Global Financial Crisis decisively refuted that verdict. Sales of Das Kapital surged; mainstream economists began revisiting Marx's theory of capitalism's self-destructive tendencies. Marxism's relevance today lies not in its revolutionary roadmap but in its analytical categories - class, alienation, exploitation & ideology.

Thomas Piketty showed that unchecked capitalism systematically widens inequality, confirming Marx's analysis of capital concentration. Wolfgang Streeck identified cumulative decay at the heart of neoliberal capitalism and Richard Wolff documented the persistence of poverty & insecurity inside affluent societies. Georg Lukacs showed in History & class Consciousness, capitalism converts human social relations into thing-like, market-mediated exchanges.

Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony explains how ruling class ideas circulate as common sense through media, consumerism and civil society.

Herbert Marcuse sharpened this : "a comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilization."

Critics are not without force. Max Weber showed that economy alone cannot explain cultural and religious development. Karl Popper called Marxism a closed, unfalsifiable system & Hannah Arendt linked its orthodoxy to totalitarian outcomes in practice.

Yet Marxism remains indispensable as a critical diagnostic. The deeper capitalism's contradictions grow, the sharper its analytical purchase becomes.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2020 · 10 marks

Comment on Liberalism as a revolutionary idea. [150 words]

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 Liberalism born in crisis of feudalism → not reform but replacement of political foundations
- R2 Liberal ideas entered history as challenge to entire inherited order — birth, status, divine right

Body flow

Feudalism + absolutism as target → **Locke**: natural rights, consent, limited government → individual replaces king as unit of politics → Glorious Revolution, American Revolution, French Revolution as proof → economic transformation: free market breaks feudal restrictions → political transformation: constitutionalism, civil rights, representation replace monarchy

Counter-view

Marx: liberalism revolutionary only in dismantling feudalism; once capitalism secured, it turned into ideology defending new privilege

Conclusion routes

- R1 Revolutionary at origin, conservative in maturity — ideas outlasted the impulse
- R2 Its lasting contribution: it made individual rights the permanent grammar of modern politics

Liberalism emerged not as a reform of the old order but as its replacement. Feudal Europe rested on birth, status and divine right - the idea that Kings ruled by God's will and individuals has obligations, not rights. Liberalism demolished this foundation and built a new one: reason, natural rights, consent and contract.

John Locke gave this challenge its sharpest expression. He argued that human beings possess natural rights to life, liberty and property and that political authority is legitimate only when it rests on the consent of the governed. The state becomes a creation of individuals, not the other way around.

Liberal ideas moved rapidly from philosophy to history. The Glorious Revolution (1688), the American Revolution (1776), & the The French Revolution (1789) all drew from this vocabulary. Economically, liberalism broke the guild & feudal restrictions that tied labour & trade, advancing free-market capitalism & what Thomas Jefferson called the smallest possible government.

Karl Marx acknowledged this revolutionary character: liberalism dismantled feudal relations & transformed production, law and politics. Yet he also identified its limit. Once capitalism was secure and the bourgeoisie consolidated power, liberalism became the ideology of a new privilege - defining property & market freedom rather than challenging domination.

Liberalism was, therefore, revolutionary in origin & conservative in maturity. Its permanent contribution was making individual rights the standard by which all political authority must be judged.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2021 · 15 marks

"Political ideology is primarily concerned with the allocation and utilization of power." Comment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 Ideology as a system of ideas → centrally about who rules, by what authority, in whose interest → power is its organizing question

R2 **Freedden**: ideologies as "maps of the political landscape" → every map must first locate power → allocation + utilization are the map's two axes

Body flow

Four ideological positions each as a power-project → Liberalism (allocates power to individual + limited state) → Socialism (shifts power from private capital to society) → Marxism (exposes class domination as the real site of power) → Feminism (extends power to the private sphere, patriarchy as a power-structure) → **Gramsci**: coercion alone insufficient, hegemony makes power "common sense" → **Foucault**: power dispersed through discourse and surveillance, not reducible to the state

Counter-view

Ideology is not only about power — it also addresses moral values, rights, justice, and human dignity; **Arendt**: power is the human ability "to act in concert," not merely domination; ideologies are also moral vocabularies, not just power-manuals

Conclusion routes

R1 Statement is substantially true but partial — ideologies diagnose, morally judge, and propose redistribution of power; the moral dimension completes the power-question, not replaces it

R2 Ideologies are power-projects anchored in values — they cannot be reduced to power alone, but every enduring ideology must settle the power question first

Michael Freedman describes political ideologies as "maps of the political landscape: without such maps we remain clueless in politics." Every such map must, first and foremost answer one question: where does power lie, who exercises it, and to what end?

Power itself is differently understood. Robert Dahl defines it as the ability to get others to do what they would not otherwise do. Hannah Arendt refuses this coercive reading: for her, power is the human ability "to act in concert." These rival definitions are not merely philosophical - they produce entirely different ideological programmes.

The classical liberal tradition - running from John Locke's natural rights to the laissez-faire state, treats concentrated power as the primary threat to liberty. It purposes shifting that power from capital to society, through collective or state control. Marxism deepens this: for Marx, power is class domination rooted in property relations and the state is an instrument of ruling class interest, not a neutral arbiter.

Feminism further extends the terrain. It shows that power operates not only in legislatures or markets but through patriarchy. The personal is political precisely because power structures reach into private life. Antonio Gramsci adds that ideological power works not only through coercion but through hegemony: the ruling worldview becomes "common sense", naturalising what is in fact an arrangement of domination. Michel Foucault goes further still, showing that power flows through institutions, discourse and surveillance.

Arendt's insight reminds us that ideology is also a moral vocabulary - addressing rights, justice, dignity and the good life. The difference between liberalism and fascism is not only about who holds power but about what power may rightly do to human beings.

Political ideologies are, therefore, substantially power-projects - they cannot be understood without settling the power question. But that question is always embedded in a broader moral framework, which gives ideology its normative authority & not merely its political ambition.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2022 · 10 marks

Comment on the "Revolution in Permanence". [150 words]

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1 Stagist orthodoxy in Marxism → question: must revolution halt at bourgeois-democratic stage?
- R2 **Marx-Engels** coined the phrase → **Trotsky** gave it systematic theory

Body flow

Stagism rejected → uneven and combined development → bourgeois-democratic revolution passes into socialist revolution in unbroken chain → world-system logic → Russian Revolution must spread → human emancipation, not just state seizure

Counter-view

Soviet failure revealed limits → **Mao** echoed the idea but outcomes remained bounded by national conditions

Conclusion routes

- R1 Revolution in Permanence as theoretical corrective to mechanical Marxism
- R2 Its core insight — revolution must be continuous and global — remains the most unresolved challenge in socialist politics

Orthodox Marxism treated historical stages - feudalism, capitalism, bourgeois democracy, and only then socialism - as a fixed sequence every society must complete. Its intellectual roots lie in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who urged workers to "make the revolution permanent," but it was Leon Trotsky who gave the idea its full theoretical architecture.

Trotsky's argument rested on two linked claims. First, he rejected mechanical stagism by invoking uneven & combined development: backward countries need not replicate the full European sequence because global capitalism compresses stages, allowing a revolutionary leap from semi-feudal conditions directly into socialist transformation. Second, the bourgeois democratic revolution and the socialist revolution are not two separate events but form an unbroken chain - the proletariat, once in motion, cannot stop at liberal-democratic outcomes without betraying the revolutionary impulse.

The Russian Revolution, Trotsky argued, could not consolidate socialism within one country alone; its survival and success depended on extension to Europe. Beyond seizing state power, it aimed at human emancipation in the fullest sense.

The theory, however, faced its hardest test in practice. The Soviet failure to export revolution left Russia isolated, and Stalin's "socialism in one country" became the dominant answer. Mao's prolonged people's war echoed the idea of continuing revolutionary transformation but remained bounded by national conditions. Trotsky's theory endures as a corrective to mechanical Marxism: its central insistence - that revolution must be continuous, international and directed at full emancipation; remains the most unresolved problem in socialist theory.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2024 · 10 marks

Comment on the Decline of Liberalism. [150 words]

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 Liberalism as dominant ideology of the modern West → now faces accumulated crisis of its own making

R2 Liberalism's promise — individual rights, rule of law, democratic governance → neoliberal variant betrayed that promise

Body flow

Neoliberal inequality → **Stiglitz + Piketty** → economic discontent → populist backlash → **Mounk**: liberal democracy in retreat → **Crouch**: post-democracy gap → cultural backlash against multiculturalism + progressive liberalism → external pressures: authoritarian states, geopolitical fragmentation, self-subversion

Counter-view

Decline is not extinction: liberal institutions, rights framework, and constitutional order retain legitimacy and capacity for renewal

Conclusion routes

R1 Liberalism needs welfare correction and institutional renewal to recover social legitimacy

R2 The crisis is real, but liberalism's alternatives have not produced a coherent replacement — the project remains unfinished

Liberalism, the dominant ideology of the modern west since the enlightenment, now faces its deepest crisis in decades - not from an external conquest but from failures it generated internally.

Joseph Stiglitz called neoliberal economic policy a "failed ideology" that served elites over ordinary workers, while Thomas Piketty showed how extreme wealth concentration undermines democratic governance. Yascha Mounk captured this as liberal democracy in retreat. Colin Crouch's concept of post-democracy identifies the structural gap - formal democratic institutions persist, but actual governance increasingly serves corporate and financial interests, hollowing out citizen participation.

A cultural dimension deepens the crisis. Backlash against multiculturalism, gender equality and progressive social liberalism has mobilised large constituencies against liberal values. Simultaneously, authoritarian states, trade wars and geopolitical fragmentation strain the post-1945 liberal international order from outside.

This decline is real, but it is not liberalism's death. Its constitutional order, rights framework and democratic norms retain legitimacy that no coherent rival has matched.

Liberalism's recovery demands what it has long deferred—welfare connection, institutional renewal and genuine social legitimacy beyond elite consensus.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2024 · 15 marks

Marxism is a political theory of action demanding strict compliance with its core principles. Comment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1** Marxism as praxis: theory must change the world → scientific self-image creates logic of compliance
- R2** Historical materialism + class struggle → deviation = betrayal of revolutionary project

Body flow

Lenin formalizes compliance: vanguard party, democratic centralism → strict discipline necessary → dictatorship of party, not proletariat

Counter-view

Luxemburg: spontaneous mass action vs. bureaucratic centralism
Popper: closed unfalsifiable system
Arendt: doctrinal rigidity feeds totalitarianism

Conclusion routes

- R1** Later traditions (**Gramsci**, **Marcuse**, **Frankfurt School**) open the framework → compliance belongs to one strand, not the whole tradition
- R2** Marxism remains theory of action — but emancipation, not orthodoxy, is its core demand

Marxism is distinguished from early socialist thought by its insistence that philosophy must not merely interpret world but change it. This is the foundation of Marxist praxis - the unity of theory & revolutionary action. Grounded in historical materialism and class struggle, Marxism presents itself as scientific socialism, Marxism presents itself as scientific socialism and it is precisely this scientific self-image that creates logic of doctrinal compliance.

Vladimir Lenin carried the logic furthest. Through the vanguard party, democratic centralism and strict party discipline, he argued that workers left to themselves develop only trade union consciousness, not revolutionary consciousness. In practice, however it shifted the dictatorship of the proletariat into dictatorship of the party, producing outcomes that contradicted Marxism's emancipatory goals.

Critics identified this failure from different directions. Rosa Luxemburg attacked Leninist bureaucratic centralism & defended spontaneous mass action as the authentic source of revolutionary energy. Karl Popper called Marxism a closed & unfalsifiable system. Hannah Arendt showed how ideological rigidity, in practice, fed totalitarian repression.

Later traditions - Antonio Gramsci's hegemony, Herbert Marcuse's critique of one-dimensional society, the Frankfurt School's critical theory - widened Marxism without abandoning its core. Marxism remains a theory of action, but the demand for strict doctrinal compliance belongs to one strand of its history, not to the tradition as a whole.

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